

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time C - The Power of Faith

October 2, 2022.

The Apostles had been traveling with Jesus for more than a year: living with him, hearing him preach, watching him perform miracles and change people's lives. They had been his disciples long enough to realize they weren't very good disciples at all. In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 17:5-19,) St Luke tells us that they still didn't understand many things that Jesus said. They still couldn't help people as much as Jesus did. It would have been tempting for them to get discouraged. But no, they **ask Jesus to increase their faith. So Jesus told them that they didn't need more faith, they just needed to use the faith they already have. He explains that a tiny little bit of faith, the size of a mustard seed - which is about as small as something can be without getting microscopic - is enough to do marvellous things.** Very often people are healed by Jesus not because of their love or their worship of the Lord but because of their faith in Jesus. We are all like the Apostles. We know in our hearts that we are capable of doing so much more, that we were made for greater things. But we don't realize that God has already given us everything we need to achieve them. He has already planted in our souls the seed of faith, of divine life - he did so at baptism. Now it's up to us to exercise it. If we do, it will grow. And the more it grows, the more room God will have to do truly wonderful things in us and through us. A deep-rooted faith can achieve the impossible, because life takes on a new significance when the power of God is at our disposal.

The prophet Habakkuk, in the First Reading (Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4) stresses the power of faith too and gives us a clearer idea of what exactly faith is. Habakkuk lived in the 6th century BC, when Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians and the majority of Jews had been deported. It was as if a hurricane had swept over the entire city of Jerusalem, like recent Fiona sweeping over the entire Maritimes. Habakkuk was in the middle of it all, he saw the devastated city and countryside, strewn with corpses, burned and barren. He felt the pinch of poverty and destruction. And he complained to God: **"How long, O Lord? I cry for help, but you do not listen!"** Like Habakkuk, we often seek instant solutions to our problems. God often seems to be silent and we complain bitterly of his absence. Our challenge is to remain faithful to God and our religious values. A strong faith doesn't mean we won't suffer and be confused in life. A strong faith doesn't take away our crosses, but a strong faith does show us where to turn when the crosses come: to God, our all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving Father. God promises Habakkuk that he will act, that he will restore Israel's fortunes but he implies it may take longer than Habakkuk would like: "If it delays," God says, "wait for it." God shows that he is not blind to our sufferings. He is watching over us, no matter what. He promises that if we continue to have faith in him, in spite of suffering and hardship, we "shall live". **Faith isn't a problem-free philosophy. Faith is strength with length - it's the power to persevere through difficulties - the power that comes from knowing that our Father's in charge.**

Sometimes we don't experience the full power of faith in our lives because we have the wrong idea of what faith really is - **we think a mature faith makes for smooth sailing in life, when in fact, it doesn't.** In 2007, a book was published with the letters written by Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta to her spiritual directors. The public and the media were shocked by these letters. For fifty years **Mother Teresa struggled with an interior darkness and the feeling of being abandoned by God.** In one of her letters, she wrote: **"Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? The child of your Love, and now [I have] become as the most hated one, the one You have thrown away as unwanted, unloved... Where is my Faith? Even deep down right in there is nothing but emptiness and darkness."** Everyone thought that Mother Teresa was the happiest person in the world, that her faith was so strong that nothing bothered her. Mother Teresa is a saint. Her faith was mature, strong, and contagious - it moved mountains, and it's still moving mountains. Her faith was so strong that she fulfilled her promise never to deny God anything that he asked - but it didn't take suffering out of her life. Faith does not lead to a problem

free life. **The kind of faith we have is best shown by the type of life we lead. This is a proper indication of our Christianity. If we believe in Jesus, we will give him unswerving allegiance in our everyday lives, by living as he would have us live and by loving God and our neighbour.** If that's our idea of faith, then we too, like Mother Teresa, will be able to move mountains - even when our souls are so dark that we can't see them.

Sometimes our faith never gets beyond the mustard-seed stage because we have the wrong idea of what it really is. **Faith involves believing in Christ and his goodness. But it's a kind of belief that also requires action. The word "faith" is derived from the Latin word "fides" [FEE-days].** Faith always implies being faithful - it implies a commitment to another person, a trusting commitment. And that means sticking by that person's side. For us, that person is Christ. **Faith in Christ means following Christ.** Picture a man on a sinking ship. He may believe in a life-preserver. He may remember cases of people being saved because they were wearing a life-preserver when their ship went down. He may be a physicist, and understand the laws of hydro-dynamics that make the life-preserver work. But if this man doesn't actually put on the life-preserver and strap himself in - his faith is absolutely useless. **If we want to move mountains and to experience God's power doing wonders in our lives, we have to put what we believe into practice, more and more, day after day, always faithful!**

In just five days, we will be celebrating the memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary. The origin of this liturgical celebration provides a powerful example of how we can exercise our faith. In 1204 Venetian Crusaders traveling to the Holy Land sacked Constantinople. The city was stripped clean. In the first half of the 1400s, Ottoman Turks ringed the walls of Constantinople, making it a tiny Christian island in a vast Islamic sea. Year after year, Constantinople was struggling for air. In 1453 the thick, high walls of Constantinople were breached. The Turks let loose on the city, slaves were taken, churches desecrated, the Hagia Sophia turned into a mosque. All of Europe now lay before the Turks. No one and nothing stopped the Ottoman Turks until Our Lady did. The naval battle of Lepanto was the "September 11, 2001" moment of its generation. On the first Sunday of October, 1571, the ships of a Holy League of Catholic Kingdoms and the Papal States defeated the Ottoman navy decisively in the seas off Greece. Islam was stopped in its tracks. Pope Saint Pius V, a Dominican, animated and organized the Holy League. He implored the faithful throughout Europe to pray the rosary, and himself led a rosary procession in the Eternal City, for Christian triumph. The ships of the Holy League were outmatched and outnumbered and needed all the divine assistance prayer could muster. These prayers were answered. The doors to the Mediterranean, and to the Atlantic beyond, were shut on the Turks. The Christian forces had never before defeated the Muslim navies in a sea battle. But that day they did. Pope Pius V attributed the victory to the prayers of Christians, and established the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary in gratitude to God. All of us have some Lepanto-like situations in our lives. Relatives who have abandoned the Church, obstacles that seem insurmountable, loved ones who are suffering. Our faith - even if it's as small as a mustard seed - can give us victory - if we put it into action by marshalling our forces and backing them up with heartfelt prayer. In thanksgiving for this miraculous victory, Pius V instituted the "**Feast of Our Lady of Victory,**" later changed to "**Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.**" Pope Leo XIII added the title "**Queen of the Most Holy Rosary**" to the Litany of Loreto in honour of Mary's powerful intercession through the rosary.